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ABSTRACT

A study identified characteristics of social skills and communication qualities that prospective teachers should possess in order to work effectively with students, parents, administrators, and other teachers, and sought to use those findings in designing a communication course for prospective teachers. Subjects, 343 practicing teachers of secondary speech or drama identified competencies they felt were most important. Of the 40 most frequently mentioned competencies, personality characteristics, interpersonal skills and relationships, and planning skills were deemed most important. A course was then developed to examine basic communication theories and to apply the identified skills to teaching strategies. In order to determine whether the course improved the students' communication skills, three groups of students were surveyed. Two of the groups received no special treatment, while the third group took the new course. Results showed that the course emphasizing communication strategies increased students' confidence in their communication skills. (Tables of data are included.) (DF)

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"APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS: EFFECTIVE INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS, TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS"

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of social skills and communication qualities desirable for teacher candidates to possess in order to work effectively with (A)their students (B)other teachers (C)parents of their students (D)district administrators, and to incorporate those findings into a course for teacher education in order to produce skilled and confident communicators.

Through a Delphi Technique categories of skills were distilled from questionnaires sent nation-wide to 343 practicing teachers of secondary speech communication/drama. Responses from 38 states were tallied. Eight categories of skills were identified with forty extended definitions of the categories.

A consultation process between selected members of two departments on a university campus (department of education and department of speech communication) provided a framework to implement the identified skills into a speech course for future teachers.

Follow-up data indicated that future teachers feel more confident in their ability to interact effectively with four levels of communication (i.e., students, teachers, parents, administrators) after taking a course geared specifically to obtaining the communication skills identified from the study than do the future teachers who have taken only minimum requirements of one speech course to graduate.

APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS: EFFECTIVE INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS, TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

A plethora of information on the importance of positive teacher-student relationships exists (Barker, 1982; Bassett & Smythe, 1979; Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978). If those communication links are so important, why not teach those skills in teacher education programs? Most colleges and universities believe they are doing that very thing when their general program requires a basic speech course. While requiring a basic speech course certainly is a step in the right direction, still more is needed if future teachers are expected to acquire skills and techniques in communicating with diverse audiences for a variety of purposes. Seldom, if ever, do teacher education courses instruct future teachers in conferencing skills with parents, other teachers, and administrators. Peck (1977) states that when student teachers are exposed to at least two interpersonal skills they exhibit significantly more affective behavior.

In order to decide upon the interpersonal skills to be taught, one must first identify the skills or competencies agreed upon as desirable (Burgess, 1963). Teacher competencies have been defined for general teaching skills (Rosner, 1972) and extended definitions of teacher competencies further clarify the general teaching skills (Cooper, et al, 1973; Houston, 1974). Swinton (1978) identified eight categories of skills with forty extended definitions of the categories.

The purpose of this study is to identify characteristics of communication qualities desirable for teacher candidates to possess in

order to work effectively with (A)their students (B)other teachers (C)parents of their students (D)district administrators, and to incorporate those findings into a course for teacher education in order to produce skilled and confident communicators.

METHOD

Recalling Swinton's 1978 study, a modified Delphi Technique was used to collect categories of skills. Competencies were distilled from questionnaires sent nation-wide to 343 practicing teachers of secondary speech communication/drama. Responses from 38 states were tallied. As reported in Table 1, eight categories of skills were identified with the frequency of the category mentioned and a rank order established.

TABLE 1
Categories and Frequencies

Category	Rank	Frequency
A. Personality characteristics	1	229
B. Interpersonal skills and relationships	2	216
C. Planning skills	3	206
D. Professional attitudes and activities	4	180
E. Educational background and training	5	149
F. Teaching strategies	6	147
G. Evaluation abilities	7	130
H. Management skills	8	116

There were 120 competency statements in the study, but space considerations have consolidated them into the forty categories which

are offered in Table 2. The categories of competencies are extended definitions which were often selected by the respondents. The rank of the statements and the means and standard deviations are given for comparison.

(---Place Table 2 about here---)

A Delphi study reveals the amount of agreement between respondents; therefore, the standard deviation for each item was examined as an indication of consensus. Swinton (1978) used a seven-point scale for the study, with one being "very unimportant" and seven being "very important." She followed the precedence of Spicer (1975) who established a 1.5 standard deviation as the criterion for consensus on a nine-point scale. Swinton considered any standard deviation falling less than 1.25 scale steps above or below the mean score to be within the parameters of consensus for the seven-point scale used in this study. One-hundred and four items had standard deviations less than 1.25, while sixteen items exceeded this figure. Based on the statistical analysis of the questionnaire, the participants reached consensus on 87% of the 120 competency statements.

After examining Table 1 and Table 2, one can see that the two top ranked categories are "Personality Characteristics" and "Interpersonal Skills and Relationships." We wondered if students currently enrolled felt confident with their communication skills. In the summer of 1985, a small sampling was taken of three classifications: freshmen currently taking the required basic speech course, preservice teachers who have taken the one required course plus education courses, and graduate speech students who have taken the interpersonal skills and communication courses. Therefore, Groups A and B had not been exposed

to the instructional communication techniques, while Group C had been exposed to the concepts. Of the three groups, only Group C had been introduced to the concepts contained in Swinton's 1978 study.

A course entitled "Instructional Communication" was developed to blend theory with practice by taking basic communication theories and applying the techniques to various teaching strategies. The syllabus of the course included activities such as: inquiry groups and team teaching; informative and persuasive speeches with group discussion; instructional games designed to utilize instructional techniques. The composition of the course consisted of elementary and secondary education students, future speech and drama teachers and adult education students. The secondary education students were from all teaching fields.

The following table reports the means for the perceptions of confidence of the three groups: Group A and Group B - no special treatment; Group C - treated to the Instructional Communication course.

TABLE 3
Educational Environment Survey of Communication Confidence

Scale	1 Very Confident	2 Confident	3 Doubtful	4 Uneasy	5 Very Uneasy

	Group A Freshmen Required Speech Class N = 22	Group B Preservice Teachers N = 14	Group C Graduate Speech Students N = 7
	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
Communication Situations - Audience Involved			
Classroom Teaching	1.93	2.00	1.43
Student/Teacher Conference	1.94	1.54	1.22
Parent/Teacher Conference	2.26	2.18	2.00
Other Teacher Conference	2.55	1.96	1.43
Administrator/Teacher Conference	3.14	2.57	1.43
Self-evaluation of Communication Skills in General	2.05	1.57	1.14

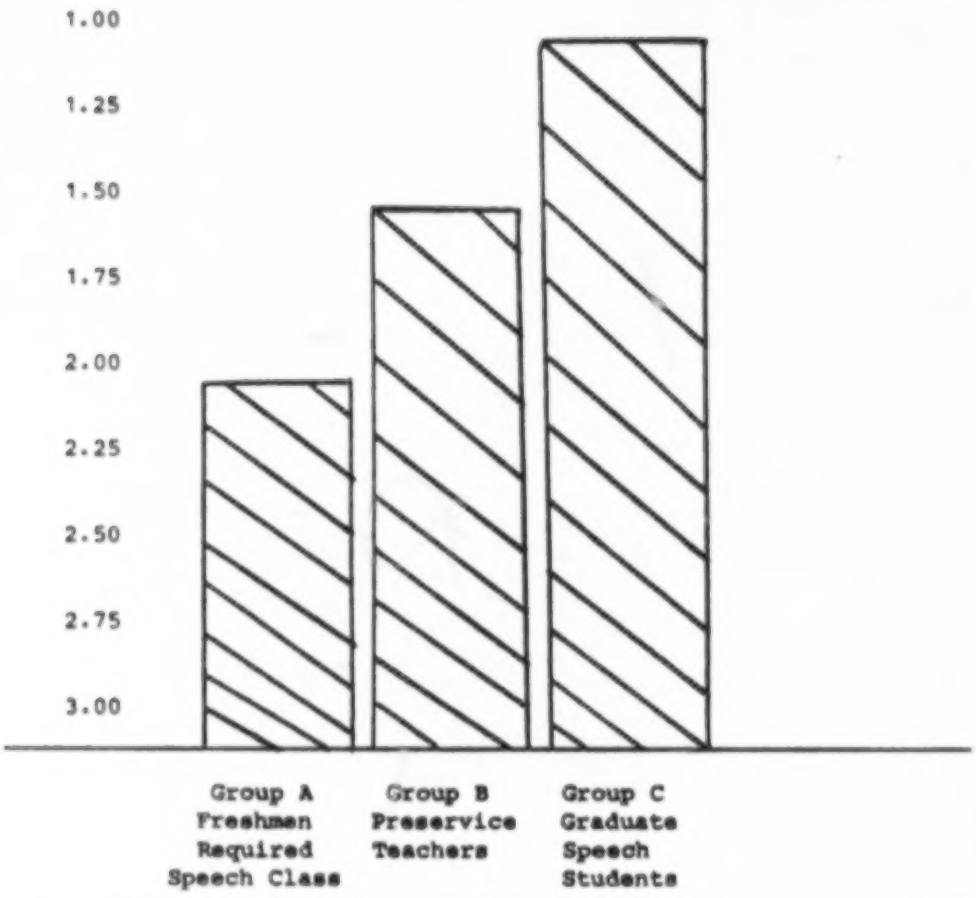
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The question "Should teacher education programs take the identified skills and directly teach them in order to obtain a preservice teacher with a high degree of confidence in conference situations with students, parents, other teachers and administrators?" begins to be answered when examining data from sampling populations such as in Table 3.

One might expect the answer to be obvious; however, evidence needs to be provided in order to establish a course to teach competency and confidence in interaction communication skills. As a result of the confidence study (O'Bryan-Garland & Swinton, 1985), role playing using Growing Together in the Classroom will be added to the course. Also, using Communication and Instruction by Bassett and Smythe, a section on interpersonal skills will be enhanced through structured role playing situations. As a direct result of the findings of the survey shown in Table 3, the course "Instructional Communication" will incorporate the interaction skills necessary for successful conferencing. Dyads will be set up between parent and teacher, student and teacher, teacher and teacher/counselor, administrator and teacher.

In examining Table 3 an interpretation of summary data can be seen as a graph depicting the overall evaluation of communication skills by the three groups. The following graph illustrates the differences in the levels of confidence as perceived by the students.

Graph 1
Self-Evaluation of Communication Skills in General



As can be seen by the above graph, the confidence needed to function successfully in interpersonal dyadic situations increases with communication training intervention.

To validate course content, further examination of the data from the Swinton 1978 study indicated areas of importance which could provide professional training guidance. The course "Instructional Communication" was built around the development of these competencies. Table 4 isolates the competency statements that have the highest rank order from the total list of 120 competency statements. The course fosters acquisition of these top ranked competencies.

TABLE 4
Top Ranked Competencies for Effective Instructional Communication

Rank Order	Competency
#1	-Enjoys teaching, with a sincere desire to participate in the education of young people.
#2	-Inspires learning through effective projection of personal enthusiasm for the subject matter taught and for students.
#3	-Possesses traits of integrity, open-mindedness, fairness, honesty, sincerity, and a sense of personal discipline.
#4	-Is motivated by wanting to help student, not to glorify self.
#6.5	-Fosters a desire for improvement and achievement in the students, encouraging them to do their best.
#6.5	-Takes courses leading to advanced degrees.
#6.5	-Establishes and manages fair and consistent discipline and expectations for students behavior when in the classroom and on extra-curricular trips.
#6.5	-Can suggest available resources and specialists for consultation to teach, to demonstrate, and to help

#9 -Must have a positive rather than a negative attitude toward student efforts and growth.

#11.5* -Provides positive, constructive, and immediate feedback (either oral or written) to students.

#11.5* -Creates and provides a relaxed, supportive, open, and structured learning atmosphere in which the students respect each other as well as the teacher.

(* These tied with two other competencies which were subject matter specific.)

Two departments (Education and Speech Communication) touch the professional programs of preservice teachers. By working together a course designed to incorporate the findings of the Delphi study and the evidence of the Educational Environment Survey of Communication Confidence strives to implement application of communication concepts.

In conclusion, results of these two studies contribute to the knowledge-base of communication skills in teacher education. Further research and dissemination of the fingings will provide keys to the challenge of interpersonal communication between teachers and students, parents, other faculty, and administrators.

TABLE 2
Category Competencies

Rank	Competencies	X	SD
A.	**Personality Characteristics**		
2	Inspires learning through effective projection of personal enthusiasm for the subject matter taught for students	6.630	.976
3	Possesses traits of integrity, open-mindedness, fairness, honesty, sincerity, and sense of personal discipline	6.566	.968
4	Is motivated by wanting to help students, not glorify self	6.539	.998
9	Must have a positive rather than a negative attitude toward student efforts and growth	6.518	.863
20	Displays an operating sense of humor, reflecting a mature ability to put situations, him/herself in realistic perspective	6.413	1.002
B.	**Interpersonal Skills and Relationships**		
25	Strives for mutual respect in relationships with students	6.371	1.019
31	Seeks to establish an open, comfortable, non-threatening, constructive rapport with students	6.336	.911
35	Assists the students in developing strong self-concepts, self-worth competencies, self-awareness and self-confidence	6.294	.941
41	Must be able to work in a cooperative manner with administrators, the rest of the faculty, and the staff (custodians, cooks, secretaries)	6.259	1.099
46	Must be assertive in communication the value of speech and drama to administrators, parents, fellow faculty members, and the community at large	6.224	.975
C.	**Planning Skills**		
24	Is well-organized in planning classroom curriculum and rehearsal/practice schedules	6.392	.880
42	Can rehearse a play cast	6.252	1.084

47.5	Focuses on individual student development rather than public performance or competition	6.217	1.022
55.5	Recognizes and provides for individual differences, abilities, and interests	6.126	1.103
61.5	Reinforces student learning by returning evaluations, papers, and tests to the student as soon as possible	6.112	1.205
D.	**Professional Attitudes and Activities**		
1	Enjoys teaching, with a sincere desire to participate in speech education of young people	6.630	.976
6.5	Takes courses leading to advanced degrees	6.532	.591
16.5	Is informed about current research and materials in his or her field	6.448	.886
18	Joins and participates in professional organizations at the local, state, regional, and national levels	6.441	.997
27.5	Has many interests outside the formal classroom, keeping up on current local, state, national, and international events	6.357	.967
E.	**Educational Background and Training**		
6.5	Can suggest available resources and specialists for consultation to teach, demonstrate, or rehearse students and staff	6.532	.637
11.5	Should have had a student teaching experience as well as a comprehensive methods course covering the specific fields of speech and drama	6.490	.721
11.5	Understands the various purposes of speeches	6.490	.759
14.5	Is able to provide instruction in mass media and related skills	6.483	1.144
22	Recognizes the modes of delivery	6.399	.865
F.	**Teaching Strategies**		
14.5	Gives clear instructions for all assignments	6.483	1.144
33.5	Is able to provide instruction on parliamentary procedure	6.308	.807
44	Recognizes body language as a form of communication	6.231	.845

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58	Develops assignments to incorporate a wide variety of experiences	6.112	.770
69.5	Is able to provide instruction in skills and techniques of listening	6.063	.890
G.	**Evaluation Abilities**		
6.5	Fosters a desire for imporvement and achievement in students, encouraging them to do their best	6.532	.591
11.5	Provides positive, constructive, and immediate feedback (either oral or written) to students following a speech or performance	6.490	.721
16.5	Evaluates student achievement in terms of previously announced criteria	6.448	.886
18	Gives positive reinforcement to student speech behaviors, never demeaning the student with unkind or destructive assessments	6.441	.997
27.5	Offers specific, rathe than general, individual suggestions to pinpoint areas in need of improvement	6.357	.967
H.	**Management Skills**		
6.5	Establishes and manages fair and consistent discipline and expectations for student behavior in the classroom and on extra-curricular trips	6.532	.637
11.5	Creates and provides a relaxed, supportive, open, and structured learning atmosphere in which the students respect each other as well as the teacher	6.490	.759
22	Instills a sense of self-discipline in students	6.399	.865
74.5	Possesses knowledge of the elements of speech and demonstrates proper use of them	6.007	.923
86.5	Organizes, directs, and administers effective extra- and co-curricular speech/drama programs	5.874	1.106

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